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28 June 2013

Mrs Hardman
Interim Executive Principal
Cowes Enterprise College
Crossfield Avenue
Cowes
Isle of Wight
PO31 8HB

Dear Mrs Hardman

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cowes Enterprise College

Following my visit with Victor Chaffey and Andrew Lyons, Additional inspectors, to your college on 26 and 27 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The college is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The college may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for the Isle of Wight.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012.

- Improve achievement by eradicating any inadequate teaching and increasing the amount of good teaching, in particular by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high enough expectations of their students
 - take proper account of students' abilities and what students already know, understand and can do when planning lessons
 - set work that is at the right level and challenges everyone
 - ensure that their lessons engage and interest students and move at a good pace
 - check students' understanding as the lesson progresses, adapting their teaching to enable everyone to make progress
 - provide opportunities that enable students to develop their reading, writing and speaking skills to a higher level
 - provide feedback that gives students clear guidance about how to improve their work.

- Improve the school's timetable and curriculum for September 2013 to ensure that it enables students to achieve well, ensuring that:
 - students study an appropriate balance of subjects, well timetabled across the week
 - fewer Year 7 classes are split between teachers
 - early GCSE examination entry does not limit the achievement of more-able students, or lead to poor preparation for A-level study or ineffective use of time in Year 11
 - lessons in personal, social, health and religious education are well planned and are of high quality.

- Improve leadership and management across the school by ensuring that:
 - leaders' roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear
 - the quality of teaching is monitored thoroughly, with rigorous follow up
 - teachers are provided with precise and thorough feedback about their performance and high-quality professional development and support that enable them to improve their teaching
 - teachers are able to judge students' achievement accurately
 - the methods for checking how effective the school is are thorough, precise and accurate, and based on rigorous, well-coordinated monitoring of all aspects of its work
 - leaders make the best use of information about students' current achievement when they evaluate the college's work.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work including 22 lessons. An inspector also made a number of short visits to lessons with the college's special educational needs coordinator to focus specifically on the support for disabled students and those with special educational needs. They scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive principal, head of school and other senior leaders, three subject leaders, a representative group of staff, groups of students, members of the governing body and Cowes Pathfinder Trust, a representative from the local authority and an external school improvement adviser employed to work with the leadership team.

Context

An interim executive principal has joined the college since the previous monitoring inspection. Two experienced headteachers from schools on the mainland are also providing support for the leadership and management of behaviour and safety. One member of the senior leadership team has left the college. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned from the post and been replaced by the Chair of Cowes Pathfinder Trust. Following this move, the new Chair of the Governing Body has stood down from their role as Chair of Cowes Pathfinder Trust. Two other governors have left the governing body and one new governor has been appointed. A clerk to the governing body has also been appointed. A decision has been taken that the college will move into its new building at the start of the autumn term. Plans for the college to become a sponsored academy in either January or April 2014 are progressing well.

Achievement of pupils at the college

Students' achievement is improving. The academic targets set for students are more challenging and this is helping to raise aspirations in the college. The progress of students towards these targets is being tracked well and interventions to support underachieving students are being used increasingly well to help them catch up. Inspectors also observed that students now make good progress in a higher percentage of lessons than was the case during the previous inspection. As a result, students' attainment is beginning to rise. The college's information on students' progress indicates that current Year 11 and sixth form students are on track to attain higher standards this summer than was the case last year.

Despite these improvements, some groups of students are not yet making the progress that they should. For example, the progress made by boys, middle attaining students, disabled students and those with special educational needs remains too low. The achievement of those students eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding for students eligible for free school meals,

from service families or who are looked after by the local authority) is beginning to improve, but their attainment remains too low. There also remains too much variation in achievement between different subjects in the college both in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Inspectors observed a higher percentage of lessons in which teaching was good than was the case during the inspection in November. A small proportion of outstanding teaching was also observed. The percentage of lessons in which teaching is inadequate has declined, although not been fully eradicated. Despite these improvements, teaching is not yet consistently good enough to ensure that students are making enough progress to catch up the ground lost during their earlier years at the college.

The quality of teachers' lesson planning has improved due to consistent use of a new lesson planning proforma. Lesson planning has an appropriate focus on making the aims of lessons clearer and these are pitched at different levels to meet the needs of all students. Good relationships between teachers and students and the impact of this on students' good behaviour was a positive feature of the large majority of the lessons observed. Where teaching has the greatest impact on learning, the planned work meets the needs of all students well and quickly engages their interest. Students understand what they are required to do and lessons proceed at a good pace. In these lessons, students are actively engaged in learning and teachers make effective use of questioning to check, explore and develop students' understanding. In the less successful lessons teachers are not matching work closely enough to the learning needs of all students, particularly the more able. Some teachers still talk for too long, do too much work for students and do not provide activities that engage and interest them fully.

Staff now have a better understanding of the specific learning needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs in their class through information provided to them. The methods used to support the learning of these students have improved; however, inconsistencies in practice remain. For example, inspectors observed teaching assistants providing good support to students in some lessons, while their skills were underutilised in others because they had not been given clear guidance by teachers.

There has been some limited improvement to the quality of teachers' written feedback to students. Inspectors saw good examples of teachers making effective use of the new assessment policy to provide helpful 'what went well' and 'even better if' comments to students. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across the college with some books marked with comments that were simply congratulatory giving no advice for improvement or in a few cases books not even recently marked.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well in the large majority of lessons. Students and staff report that behaviour is improving, particularly so since the arrival of the new interim executive principal. However, students also reported that their lessons were occasionally disrupted by a few students misbehaving and inspectors observed some poor behaviour in a very small minority of lessons. As was the case during the previous inspection, students continue to be polite, friendly and cooperative. The large majority of students behave sensibly around the school site; however, a few younger students did raise concerns about some pushing and shoving in the corridors. Students reported that incidents of bullying were rare but that when they did occur staff dealt with these incidents well. They talked positively about the work of the college's mentors in this regard. The college continues to place a high priority on students' good attendance; however, levels of attendance have declined slightly since the inspection in November and are now just below the national average. Senior leaders recognise the importance of quickly addressing this issue.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the interim executive principal and the two temporary part-time additions to the senior leadership team has strengthened leadership capacity to drive improvement. The interim executive principal is ambitious in her desire to drive rapid improvement in the college and is providing clear and effective leadership. She is being well supported by senior leaders and has won the confidence and commitment of staff. Senior leaders are very clear about the strengths of the college and the weaknesses that still need to be addressed. Senior leadership roles have been developed and defined well and are closely linked to the priorities in the college improvement plan.

Middle leaders are committed to improving outcomes for students but they vary in their effectiveness in driving improvement and their skills are not yet being fully utilised. They are not sufficiently involved in monitoring and evaluation and they are not being held suitably accountable for students' progress through a well-defined line management process. However, training is being provided to middle leaders and a sensible plan is in place to restructure the line management procedures for middle leaders before the start of next term.

Improving the quality of teaching in the college is being driven by accurate monitoring of teaching by senior leaders, with effective use being made of external consultants to improve teaching practice.

Senior leaders rightly recognise that the leadership and management of provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs require improvement. Although there are some strengths in the quality of provision for the emotional and

social development of disabled students and those with special educational needs, there has not been sufficient focus on their academic progress. For example, a system to check upon the progress of these students has only very recently been introduced. Senior leaders have well-conceived plans in place to address this issue.

The college has made good progress in improving its curriculum and timetable for September 2013. The new curriculum structure will provide a much better balance of subjects that are well timetabled across the week. External consultants have provided support for the writing of the school timetable for next academic year, and as a result, the number of classes that will be split between different teachers has been greatly reduced. In addition, leaders are more aware of teachers' subject expertise and this is now being effectively used to ensure that there is much better match between teachers' subject knowledge and the courses and subjects they are being asked to teach.

The governing body demonstrates a strong commitment to improvement. The implementation and impact of the college improvement plan are monitored well and governors provide a good level of challenge and support to senior leaders. Governors have developed sensible plans to secure the long-term stability in senior leadership as the college moves to academy status.

External support

The local authority and college leaders liaised closely over the creation of the local authority's statement of action and the college's improvement plan. The local authority has very limited capacity to provide support to the college regarding the implementation of its improvement plan; however, they have part funded support from an external school improvement service. A range of external consultants has provided good quality, effective support to the college. This support has been for leadership and management, teaching and behaviour and safety. The local authority is taking appropriate action to monitor the implementation of the college's improvement plan.